

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 AID-20 DPW-01 NEA-11

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10

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R 061100Z FEB 74

FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1483

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY BERN

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY VIENNA

USUN NEW YORK 0604

CINCPAC

AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL DANANG

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

UNCLAS SAIGON 01639

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJ: STATUE OF "OUR LADY OF FATIMA" TOURS VIET-NAM: MASS

FOR PEACE IN SAIGON DRAW THOUSANDS

PARIS FOR USDEL JEC ALSO.

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ROME FOR ILLING

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

1. A MAMMOTH CROWD, BUT PROBABLY UNDER THE 300,000 REPORTED IN THE PRESS, ATTENDED AN OPEN AIR MASS BEHIND SAIGON'S BASILICA ON SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 3. THIS MASS FOR PEACE WAS THE CLIMAX OF A TOUR OF VIETNAM BY A STATUE OF THE "QUEEN OF PEACE," A HALLOWED FIGURE FROM THE SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF FATIMA IN PORTUGAL. THE STATUE IS CURRENTLY ON A WORLD TOUR. THOUGH THE THRONG WAS PREDOMINANTLY CATHOLIC, CAO DAI, QUOC TU BUDDHIST, AND, ACCORDING TO PRESS ACCOUNTS, HOA HAO DELEGATIONS ALSO ATTENDED THE MASS. PRESIDENT THIEU, HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER WERE AMONG THE MANY DIGNITARIES PRESENT. OFFERINGS WERE SENT BY THE AN QUANG UNIFIED BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION, RETIRED GENERAL DUONG VAN ("BIG") MINH, AND FORMER VICE PRESIDENT NGUYEN CAO KY, THOUGH NEITHER KY NOR MINH WERE THERE.

2. DURING ITS SOJOURN IN VIETNAM, THE STATUE WAS DISPLAYED IN QUANG TR, DANANG, QUI NHON, BIEN HOA, PHU CUONG (BINH DUONG), TAY NINH (WHERE, ACCORDING TO FR. MCVEIGH, CRS, THE STATUE WAS TAKEN IN PROCESSION THROUGH THE CAO DAI TEMPLE AT THE CAO DAI HOLY SEE) MY THO AND SAIGON.

3. AT 0650 ON FEBRUARY 3, THE STATUE WAS BROUGHT BACK TO SAIGON BY HELICOPTER, LANDING IN TAO DAN PARK, NEAR INDEPENDENCE PALACE, ALONG WHOSE FACADE WAS STRUNG A BANNER PROCLAIMING, "WE BESEECH MOTHER MARY TO GRANT PEACE TO THE PEOPLE OF VIETNAM." THE STATUE WAS PLACED ON A FLOWER-DECKED FLOAT, AND THE PROCESSION BEGAN. AS IT PASSED IN FRONT OF INDEPENDENCE PALACE, THE PRESIDENT AND HIS FAMILY, CLAD IN TRADITIONAL DRESS, CAME TO PRAY IN FRONT OF THE PALACE GATE. WHILE THE FIRST FAMILY KNELT, THE PROCESSION PAUSED AND AFTERWARD CONTINUED TO THE DAIS AT THE INTERSECTION OF TWO SAIGON'S MAIN THOROUGHFARES, THONG NHUT AND DUY TAN.

4. THERE SENATE PRESIDENT TRAN VAN LAM, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET AND THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, AND HIGH RANKING MILITARY OFFICERS AS WELL AS REPRESENTATIVES OF RELIGIOUS GROUPS PAID HOMAGE TO THE "QUEEN OF PEACE." AT THE DAIS, PRESIDENT THIEU OFFERED A BASKET OF ROSES AND A CENSER CONTAINING EARTH TAKEN FROM THE NORTH VIETNAMESE OCCUPIED NORTH BANK OF THE THACH HAN RIVER IN QUANG TRI

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AND BEARING AN INSCRIPTION ASKING MARY'S INTERCESSION FOR PEACE IN VIETNAM. THE PRESIDENT BOWED TO THE STATUE IN VIETNAMESE FASHION WITH HIS HANDS CLASPED BEFORE HIM.

5. AT 0815 ARCHBISHOP NGUYEN VAN BINH OF SAIGON CONCELEBRATED A MASS FOR PEACE WITH TWENTY-EIGHT PRIESTS, INCLUDING HIS ASSISTANT BISHOP. IN HIS SERMON, ARCHBISHOP BINH WAS QUOTES AS SAYING, "EVERYONE MUST WIPE OUT HATRED AND MUST COME

TOGETHER TO BUILD A PEACEFUL WORLD AND SOON RESTORE PEACE TO VIETNAM." SO MANY WERE THE FAITHFUL, THAT PLANS TO DISTRIBUTE COMMUNION TO EVERYONE DESIRING IT WERE SCRAPPED, AND ONLY PRESIDENT AND MRS. THIEU RECEIVED, SYMBOLICALLY REPRESENTING ALL PRESENT.

6. DUE TO THE CRUSH OF THOSE WISHING TO TOUCH IT, THE STATUE WAS SPIRITED AWAY AFTER THE MASS IN AN AMBULANCE. LATER, AFTER VISITS TO DOMINICAN

INSTITUTE IN THU DUC AND DONG TIEN CATHEDRAL, THE STATUE WAS TAKEN TO TAN SON NHUT, WHERE, IN THE PRESENCE OF A MILITARY HONOR GUARD, THE "QUEEN OF PEACE" WAS PLACED IN THE FIRST-CLASS COMPARTMENT OF AIR VIETNAM'S EVENING FLIGHT FOR BANGKOK.

7 COMMENT: THE MASS FOR PEACE WAS ATTENDED BY EMBASSY OFFICERS, SOME NEAR THE FRONT OF THE CROWD, OTHERS FAR BEHIND. THE SQUARE BEHIND THE CITY'S CATHEDRAL BEGAN TO FILL AS EARLY AS 5:00 IN THE MORNING; BY THE TIME THE CEREMONY BEGAN A VAST CROWD, THE

LIMITS OF WHICH COULD NOT BE SEEN FROM NEAR THE DAIS, WAS IN ATTENDANCE, AND STILL GROWING. THE SEA OF HUMANITY WAS THE LARGEST CROWD SEEN IN SAIGON IN RECENT MEMORY, FILLING THE TSCR FNOVW HF OF THE CITY FOR SOME BLOCKS AND EXTENDING

FAR BEHIND INTO OPEN PARK SPACE AND UP DUY TAN STREET.

8. THE COLOR OF THE CEREMONY, THE MUSIC, AND THE OBVIOUS EMOTION FELT BY THE CROWD MADE THE EVENT STRIKING AND MOVING. PRESIDENT AND MRS. THIEU PARTICIPATED MODESTLY IN THE PROCEEDINGS. WHEN THEY KNELT, THEY KNELT ON THE NAKED TARMAC; OFFERED AN UNCLASSIFIED

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UMBRELLA TO SHADE HIM FROM THE GLARING SUN THE PRESIDENT WAVED IT AWAY; BOTH THIEUS CAME AND WENT BY FOOT, MINGLING WITH LITTLE VISIB
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